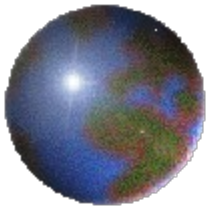
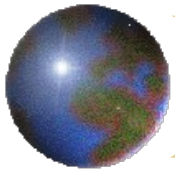


Ethical Issues in Department of the Army Nursing Practice

COL Janet Harris, AN

Janice Agazio, DNSc, RN

Funded: TriService Nursing Research Program N0



Introduction

- Understand the moral and legal right of all patients and to protect and support these rights (ANA, 1995)
- Ensuring safe and ethical nursing practice is also an imperative of nurse executives
- Technological advances

Review of the Literature

- 1994 Maryland study of RNs
  - Fry ST & Damrosh SD, *Maryland Nurse, 1994*
- 1998 Study of RNs in 6 New England States
  - Fry ST, Riley JM, Duffy ME, Currier S. Ethics and human rights in nursing practice: A Multi-State survey of Registered Nurses. Boston: *Nursing Ethics Network*, 1999

Purposes

- Identify the ethical issues experienced by Army Nurse Corps (ANC) officers and Department of the Army civilian (DAC) registered nurses (RNs)
- Frequency of their occurrence
- Identify how disturbed ANC and DAC RNs are by these ethical issues.

Research Design

- Phase 1
  - Incorporate military-specific ethical issues into the Ethical Issues Scale (EIS)
  - Focus groups
- Phase 2
  - Descriptive cross-sectional research design
  - Survey DAC RNs and ANC officers

Instrument

- Ethical Issues Scale
  - 35 item scale
  - End-of Life Treatment decisions
    - 12 items (coefficient alpha .86)
  - Patient care issues
    - 13 items (coefficient alpha .84)
  - Human rights issues
    - 5 items (coefficient alpha .74).

Duffy, M. E., Riley, J. M., & Fry, S. T. (2001) Psychometric Evaluation of Ethical Issues S

D

Phase 1

- 3 Focus groups
- Community Hospital, MEDCEN, TOE
  - DAC RN
    - Community Hospital
    - MEDCEN
  - ANC
    - MTF (Community Hospital & MEDCEN)
    - TOE
    - Deployment Experience

Analysis

- Ethograph for Windows
- Identify themes of military-unique ethical issues
- Principal Components Factor Analysis
- Reliability of subscales
  - Alpha

Revised EIS (64 items)

- End-of-Life Decisions-13 items (alpha 0.8899)
- Patient Care Issues - 14 items (alpha 0.8384)
- Human Rights Issues- 4 items (alpha 0.7398)
- Nursing Advocacy Issues - 10 items (alpha 0.8268)
- Military Issues – 9 items (alpha 0.7519)
- Deployment Issues - 7 items (alpha 0.9568)

Phase 2 Data Collection

- Descriptive cross-sectional research design
- ALL ANCs and DAC RNS in MEDCOM and FORSCOM Units (5283)
- Anonymous questionnaire
  - Mailed to contact person at MTF
- Second Mailing to facilities with return rate < 25%
- Date collected March 02 – January 03

Return rate

Mailed 5283 questionnaires

1899 questionnaires returned

Return rate - 36%

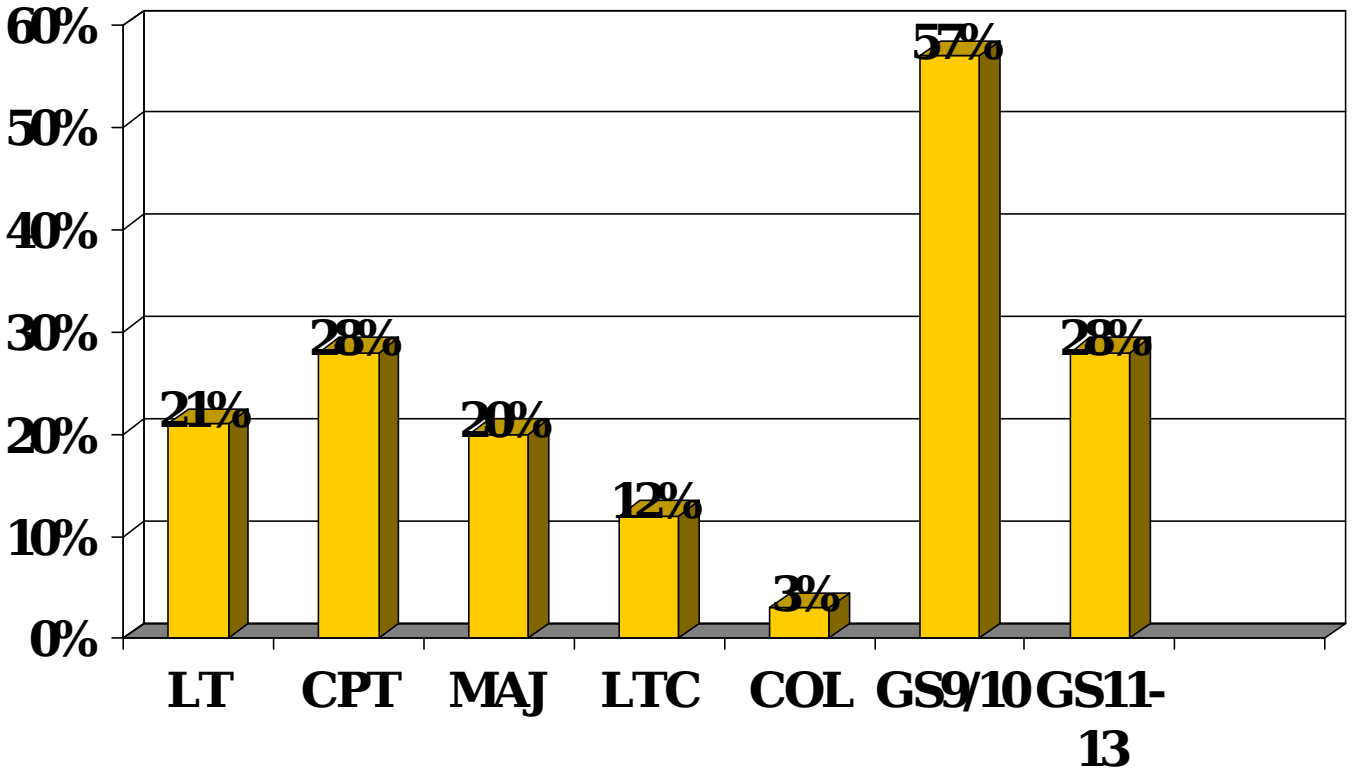
Demographics

	DAC RNs	ANCs
Age	45.5 ± 9.7	36.9 ± 8.8
Total years of Nursing Experience	19.9 ± 10.5 years	11.7 ± 8.4 years
Length of time in present position	5.6 ± 7.0 years	1.53 ± 4.0 years

Highest Education

	DAC	ANC
Diploma	11.4%	
Associate	24.4%	0.9%
Bachelors	52.2%	61.6%
Masters	18.9%	46.5%
Doctorate	0.7%	0.8%

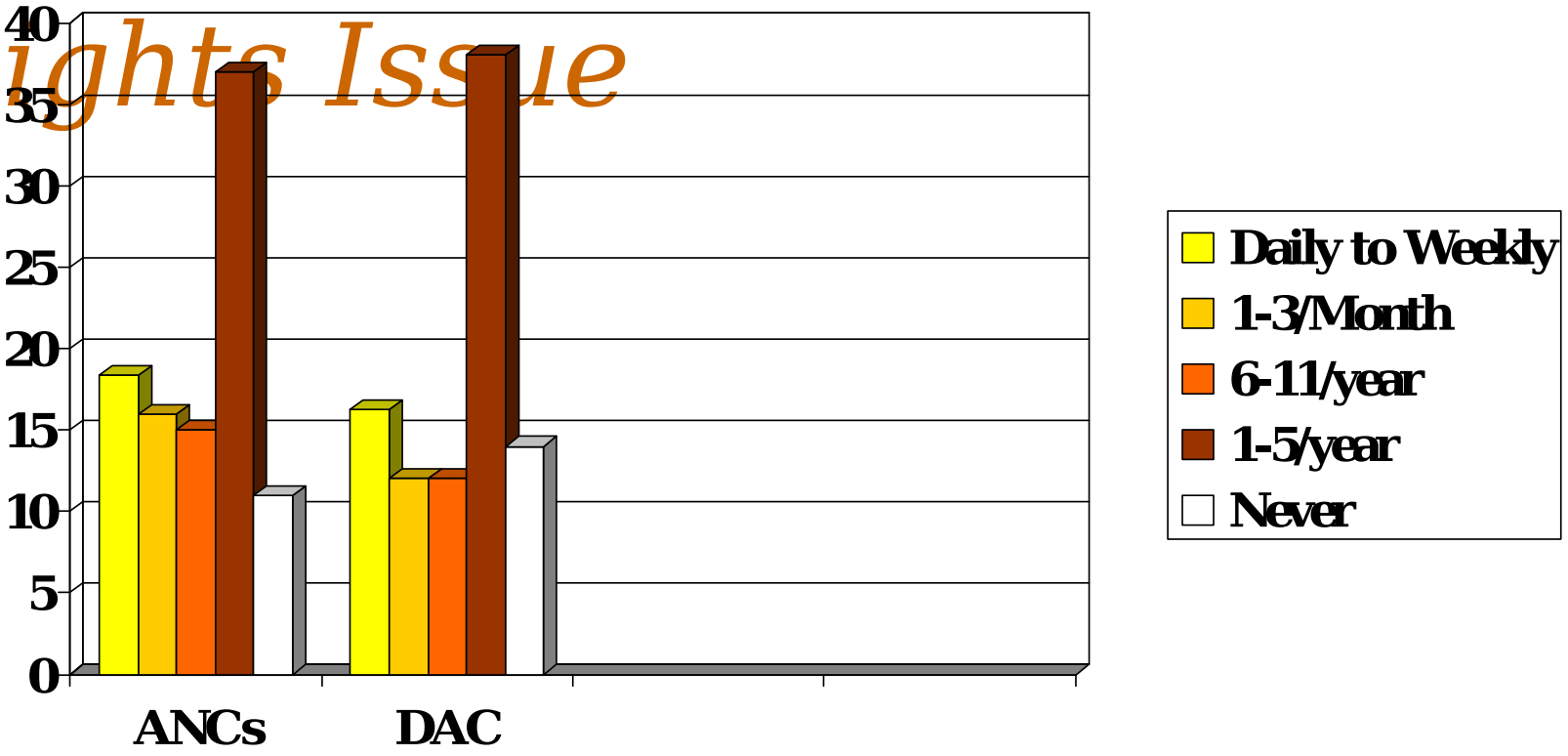
Rank/Grade


60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
21%
28%
20%
12%
3%
57%
28%
LT
CPT
MAJ
LTC
COL
GS9/10
GS11-13

Demographics

	DAC	ANC
Female	90%	66%
Ever assigned to TOE	12%	47%
Deployment experience	13%	30%

Frequency of Involvement with ANY Ethics/Human Rights Issue



Top 5 Most Frequently Occurring Ethical Issues

Rank		Issue	%
1	(1)	Protecting patient rights & human dignity	34.7
2		Staffing Patterns that limit quality of nursing care	32.6
3		Protecting patient's rights to quality nursing care	30.0
4	(5)	Staffing Patterns that limit access to nursing care	26.1
5	(2)	Respecting/not respecting informed consent to treatment	20.0

( ) Rating in Dr. Fry's Multi-state study

Frequently Occurring Ethical Issues Cont.

Rank	Issue	%
6	Mandatory overtime that effects quality of nursing care	16.3
7 (3)	Providing care with possible risk to RN's health	15.1
7 (7)	Over/under Use of pain management	15.1
9 (8)	Conflicts in nurse/doctor or other professional relationship	14.8
10 (12)	Allocating scarce/costly resources	13.1

( ) Rating in Dr. Fry's multi-state study

Most Personally Disturbing Ethics/Human Rights Issues

Rank (Rating in Dr Fry's study) Issue

***1 Staffing patterns that limit quality of nursing care**

2 Triaging soldiers into the expectant category

***3 (1) Prolonging the dying process with inappropriate measures**

4 (2) Staffing patterns that limit access to nursing care

5 (5) Working with incompetent or impaired colleagues

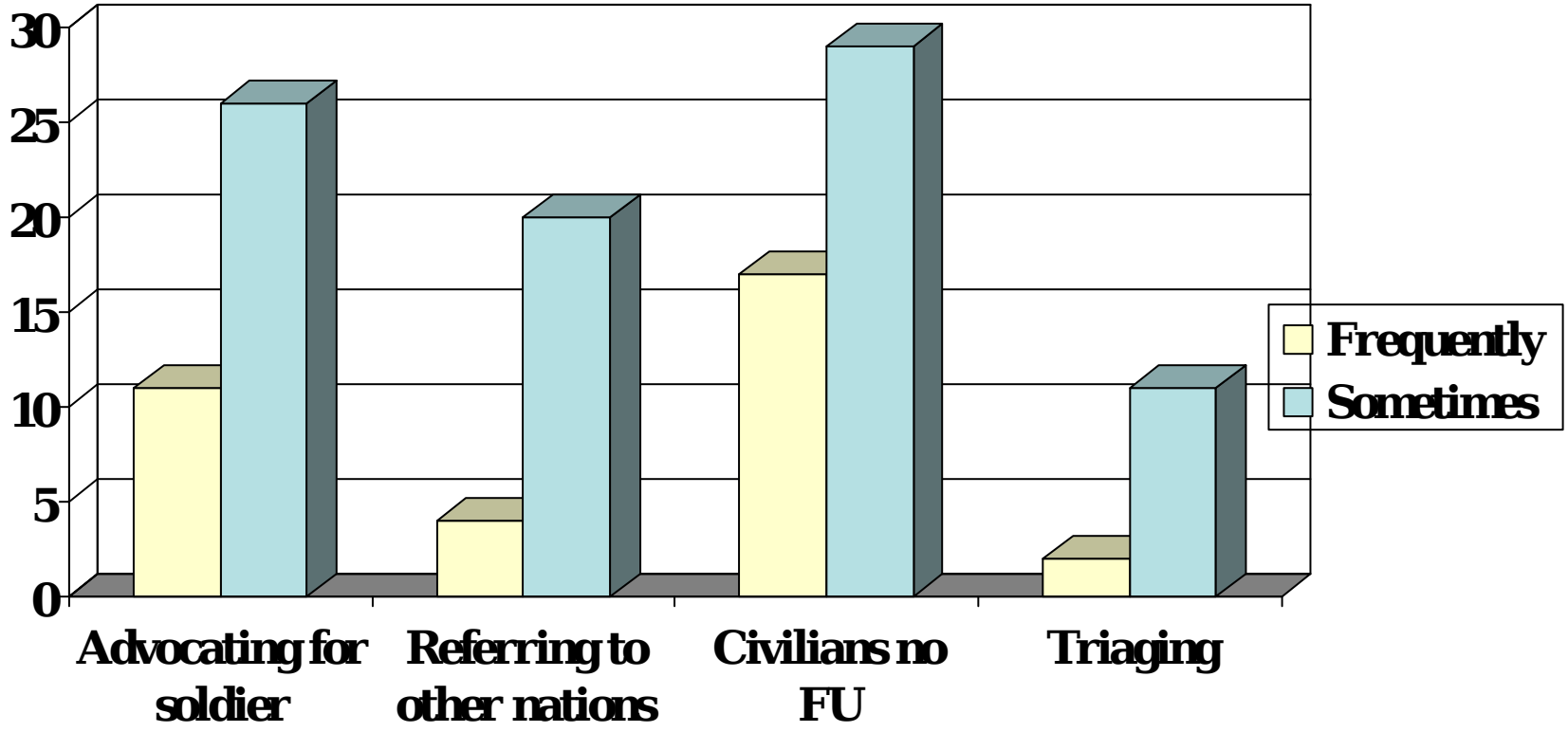
* among most frequently encountered issues

Most Personally Disturbing Ethics/Human Rights Issues

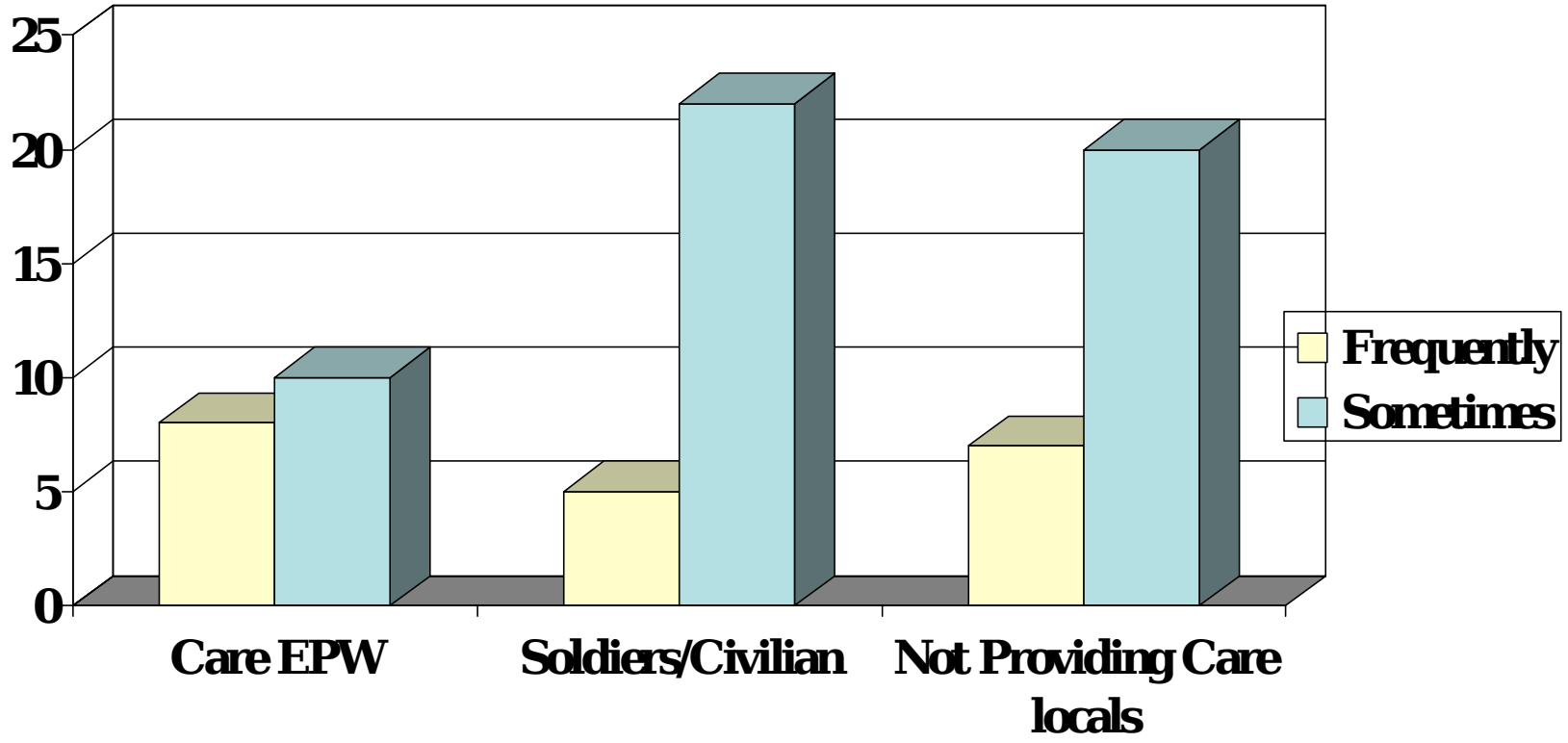
Rank	(Rating in Dr. Fry's Study)	Issue
6		Balancing Resource needs of soldiers against humanitarian mission
*7	(13)	Conflicts in nurse/physician or other professional relationship
8	(14)	Participating/not participating in euthanasia/assisted suicide
9		Prolonging the living dying process for training
10		Acting against you own personnel/religious views

* among most frequently encountered issues

Deployment Issues (n=405)



Deployment Issues (n=405)



How RNs Handled Their Last Ethics/Human Rights Issue

ACTIVITY* (Rating Dr Fry's Study) (%)	PERCENT	
1 (1) Discussed with nursing peer(s)	81.1	
2 (2) Discussed with your nursing leadership	67.4	
3 (4) Discussed with patient' physician	59.5	
4 (3) Discussed with other professional(s)	53.1	
5 Discussed with chain of command		43.0
6 (5) Discussed with patient	40.7	
7 (7) Discussed with family or friends	40.3	
8 (6) Discussed with patient's family	27.0	
9 (9) Discussed with religious counselor	17.1	
10 (8) Discussed with ethics committee		11.5

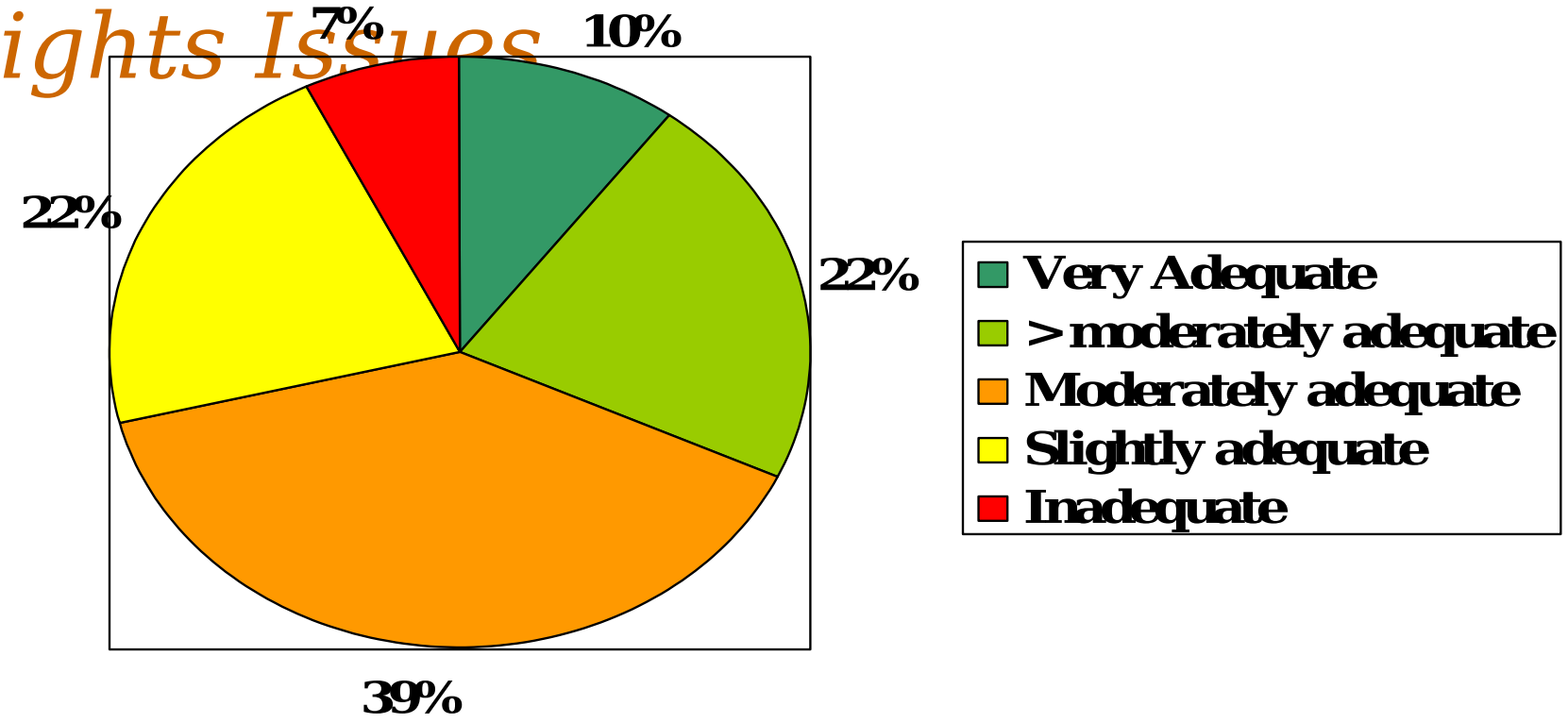
Ethics Committee

- MTF/Unit has an ethics committee
  - Yes 68.6%
  - No 3.3%
  - Don’t know 25.0%
- Ethics Committee includes nurses
  - Yes 62.6%
  - No 3.0%

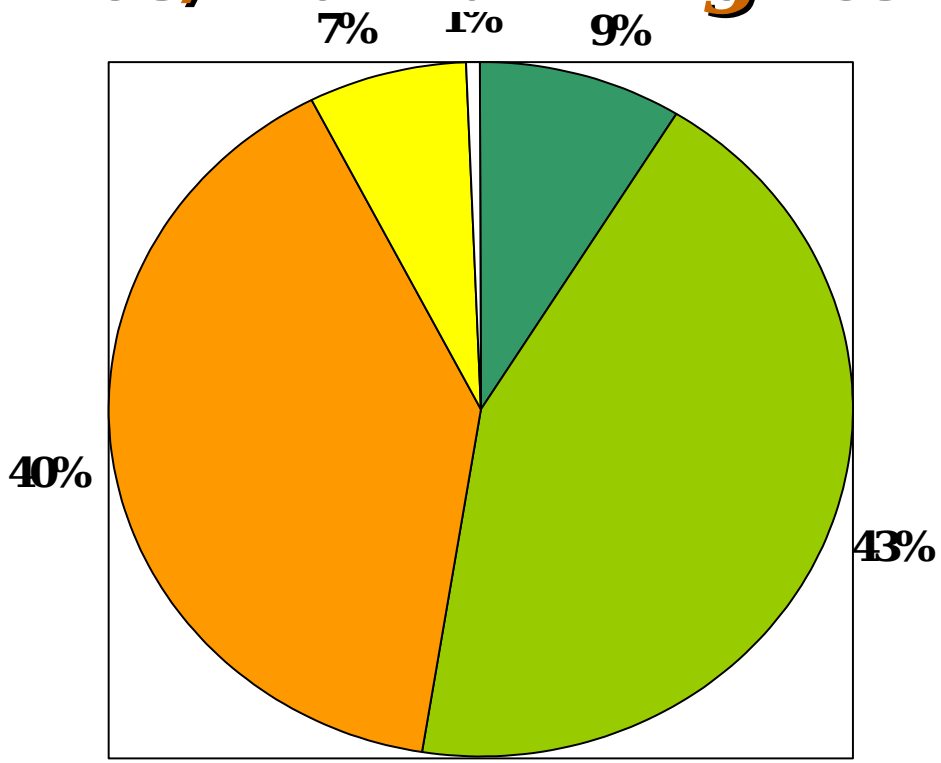
Ethics Committee

- Know how to access the ethics committee
  - Yes 49.2%
  - No 18.0%
- Would like to know more about the ethics committee
  - Yes 32.5%
  - No 35.3%

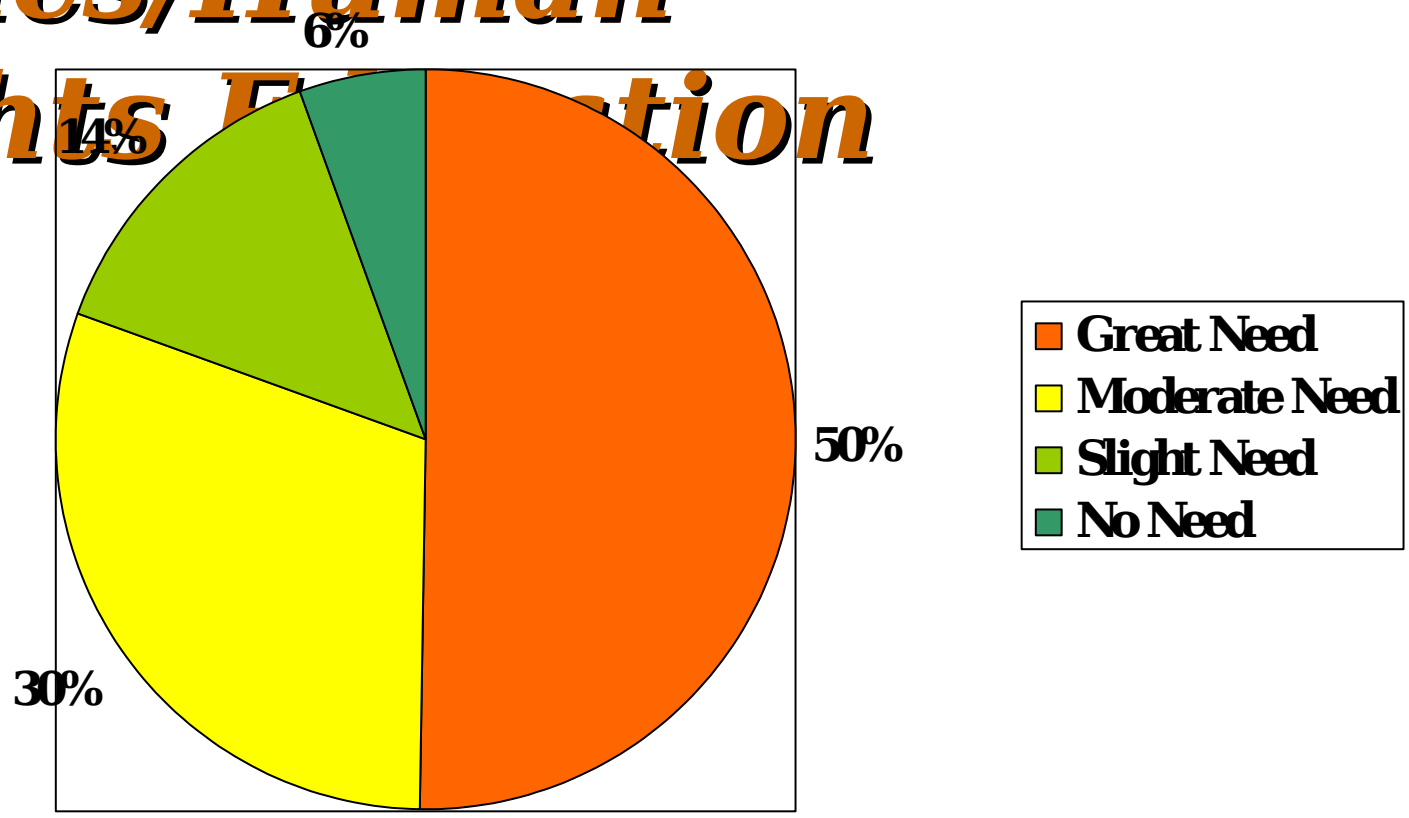
Adequacy of Workplace Resources for Ethics/Human Rights Issues



How RNs Assess Their Knowledge of Ethics/Human Rights Issues



RNs' Needs for Ethics/Human Rights Education



Most Helpful Ethics/Human Rights Educational Offerings

Rank	Issue	Percent
1	Nurse as patient advocate	73.7
2	Patient's rights, autonomy, & informed consent	71.8
3	Quality of life	67.7
4	Ethical decision making	69.6
5	Role responsibilities associated with decision making	69.0

Most Helpful Ethics/Human Rights Educational Offerings

Rank	Issue	Percent
6	Risks to nurse's health	68.7
7	Life-sustaining treatment decisions	68.5
8	End-of-life decisions	67.7
9	Ethics of triage	67.3
10	Rights and responsibilities of Active Duty Personnel	67.0

Implications

- Workplace and practice
- Education
- Research

Questions